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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development of a syllabus for elementary-level college courses in the Japanese language, with a focus on course purpose, objectives, learning materials and resources, setting, learning activities, testing, and other considerations. It examines the characteristics of students who take elementary Japanese courses and reviews theories of learning relevant to this group. Course objectives are reviewed in light of Bloom's taxonomy and expected outcomes of the course, along with the use of textbooks, workbooks, and audiovisual materials; the physical setting of the classroom; and the learning environment. The paper also discusses effective teaching techniques related to lecturing, questioning, small group activities, homework assignments, and testing and evaluation. It looks at various learning activities that can be incorporated into the course, focusing on active learning, different developmental levels, differential styles of learning, and coaching students. The paper then examines various approaches to testing, along with the issue of student perceptions of Japanese as a difficult language to learn. An appendix provides a syllabus checklist. (MDM)

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College Teaching: Syllabus Writing for the Japanese Language Course

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College Teaching: Syllabus Writing for the Japanese Language Course

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It is said that the course syllabus is a quasi-legal document and faculty members should take care in its preparation. This paper was written, based on the author's experience of teaching Japanese at an American college, to help and facilitate for the preparation of a"super syllabus" for the ELEMENTARY JAPANESE Course. The paper is divided into the following sections: Purpose, Objectives, Learning Materials and Resources, Setting, Learning Activities, Testing, and Other Considerations.

A. Purpose

1. **Course Title:** JAPN1101: ELEMENTARY JAPANESE

2. **Purpose of the Course:** In order to provide college students with the knowledge of (a) principles of pronunciation of the language, (b) basic sentence structures, and (c) useful expressions, through both oral and written practices. Upon completion of this course, the students will be able to introduce themselves and to communicate in Japanese with limited Japanese words.

3. **With Regard to Students:**

   a. **Student Characteristics.** The majority of the students, who will be Caucasian males with a few females, will be freshmen and sophomores. Their majors will include: Political Science, Criminal Justice, Music Composition, Computer Science, Communication, Journalism, International Relations, Psychology, and Anthropology. Foreign languages are part of the general education requirement. Most of the students have not learned any Japanese.

Some students would be interested in seeking employment with a Japanese company, communicating with the Japanese business world and learning about Japanese culture and history. Many students take four or five courses each semester including this course while retaining their part–time jobs.

b–1. The perry scheme of intellectual and ethical development is hierarchical; each of the nine positions of the Perry scheme is familiar in its delineation of a meaningful way of constructing the world of knowledge and value. College freshmen are generally dualistic thinkers (Right versus Wrong), but most of life's problems are multifaceted, and the knowledge base of experts is a network of interrelated ideas. These concepts hold true in learning Japanese. Most students of this course will be freshmen, and thus the Perry scheme will be meaningful indeed. The students will be encouraged to move on to the stages of MULTIPLICITY (beginning to think abstractly) and RELATIVISM (everything is relative but not equally valid). Instruction techniques, therefore, should be well–suited to developing, comparing, and understanding different points of view so that the students are able to have meaningful learning experiences through personal interpretation of ideas and concepts.

b–2. Belenky's five stages of ways of knowing should be considered in this course, especially from the stage of RECEIVED KNOWING (equivalent to dualism in Perry's scheme) to the stage of SUBJECTIVE KNOWING (intuition is used), and then to the stage of PROCEDURAL KNOWING (divided into separate mode and connected mode). Several studies, including the one by Belenky et al., found gender differences in cognitive development; the finding is compared with Perry's model which was generated from the study with the sample of males. Regarding traditional–aged college students, it is viewed that women are more interpersonal knowers than are men, who are more impersonal knowers.

White males speak more frequently and for longer periods than do white females as well as males and females of color. Researchers say that the latter are treated deferentially by teachers. The students of this course will be probably relatively homogeneous (white males), and the above issues will not pose the problem in this course.

c. **Major Developmental Tasks.** Erikson identified eight stages of human development in the lifespan, setting forth the view that development emerges out of the interaction of both internal (psychological) and external (social) events. The basis for growth is not stability but change. The students of this course will belong to ADOLESCENCE (identity versus role confusion) and YOUNG ADULTHOOD (intimacy versus isolation). According to Erikson, women develop identity in relationship, whereas men form their sense of self through separation. For men, identity precedes intimacy. For women, two are inextricably linked. For teaching in this course, Erikson's theory can be applied as follows: the components of identity are acceptance of one's appearance, recognition from those who count, and knowing where one is going and that the role confusion is most frequently caused by failure to formulate clear ideas about sex-roles and by indecision about occupational choice.

B. Objectives

4. **Course Objectives**. The students should be able to achieve the following eight objectives:

   (1) Gain fundamental knowledge of the Japanese language.

   (2) Master both *Hiragana* (used for Japanese-oriented words) and *Katakana* (used for foreign words) characters.

   (3) Develop and increase vocabulary and phrases.

(4) Develop and increase useful daily expressions.

(5) Become familiar with basic *Kanji* (used for Chinese-oriented words) characters and use them in writing sentences correctly.

(6) Listen to the tapes and begin to understand them.

(7) Watch videos and discuss the Japanese culture.

(8) Apply conversation using words learned in the class.

5. In **Bloom's Taxonomy,** objectives are classified according to a hierarchical schemata, which reflects successive degrees of cognitive complicity; the taxonomy can be effectively applied to the objectives of this course as described below:

Level 1: **Knowledge**, which applies to course objective 1: the student knows basic grammar, as well as accent, prominence, and intonation of the Japanese language.

Level 2: **Comprehension**, which applies to objectives 2 and 3: the student understands vocabularies and phrases and translates the Japanese sentences into English.

Level 3: **Application**, which applies to objective 4: the student applies principles for specific-outcome actions, such as drills and short dialogues.

Level 4: **Analysis**, which applies to objective 5: the student analyzes the organization of Kanji and the relationships between Kanji and Hiragana or Katakana.

Level 5: **Synthesis**, which applies to objective 8: the student produces new arrangement for specific-outcome actions, such as modifications and creations of new sentences or useful expressions.

Level 6: **Evaluation**, which applies to objective 6: the student judges on the

basis of external criteria and judges on the basis of evidence while listening to a variety of conversations over the tapes spoken naturally.

6. **Outcomes, Products, and Processes.** The objectives of the course are written in terms of learning outcomes, products, and processes. Specifically, the process of learning will include participation and contribution in small group activities, such as drills, short dialogues, role playing, and applied conversations using key words. The product will be reaction and reflective papers after watching videotapes or films and listening to guest speakers. The outcome will include both oral presentation and written performance based on the solid foundation of *Hiragana*, *Katakana*, and *Kanji*.
7. **Instrumental and Developmental Objectives.** Foreign language courses should be completed during the first two years. This Japanese course will meet instrumental objectives for the requirement for graduation. Students need at least 12 semester hours in any one language. The students will earn three semester hours in this course if they complete the course work and pass the tests. Developmental objectives will include the students' perceptions of gains in the knowledge of the modern Japanese language, and the students will be able to apply what they learned. Furthermore, the students will be able to get self-satisfaction from their learning experiences by exchanging letters, for instance, with school children of Japan or by having free conversations with Japanese college students.

C. Learning Materials and Resources

8. **Textbook and Workbook.** The textbook will be ***First Lessons in Japanese*** (Japanese textbook series) by Nobuko Mizutani (1993), with the supplemented

Japanese syllabic alphabet workbooks ***Hiragana for Fun*** and ***Katakana for Fun*** by Noriko Yoneji (1993). Kodansha's Japanese–English Dictionary will be also required. The textbook and workbooks were designed for the purpose of introducing a beginner to the most basic structure of the modern Japanese language. It usually takes a considerable amount of time for the beginner to become able to speak the Japanese language fluently. The textbook will enable the beginning speaker to see readily a "new world," and provide the pleasure of getting a glimpse of how the Japanese people communicate with each other.

9. **Material Currency**. The textbook and workbooks, which were updated and revised in 1993, are fairly current versions. These books have been used for all types of people who learned Japanese as a foreign language, such as children as young as four years old, first graders through twelfth graders, and college students.

10. **Material Diversity.** Japan is an extremely homogeneous country. Perhaps students will be unable to see racial issues from the learning material, such as films and videotapes as well as the textbook and handouts; however, they may see the inequality of the sexes in Japan. People have to become more sensitive to cultural differences and more accepting of them. Therefore, watching films and videotapes about Japanese (language and people) will be beneficial for the students in comparing and understanding cultural, social, and educational differences between Japan and the United States.

Media and Resources: Historically speaking, American college curriculums have favored traditional classroom learning. This course is not an exception, yet videos (Seeing is believing!) and cassettes (not only for listening comprehension but also for proper pronunciation) will be functionally used

in the course as follows.

Language Lab: Students will be required to listen to the tapes at least once a week in the language lab. The lab has tapes for all the lessons of the textbook. If the lab hours are not convenient, the students will be able to duplicate the tapes and to listen to them at home.

Films and Videotapes: At least six times during the semester, students will watch videotapes or films about Japanese language and people, and then they will discuss them.

D. Setting

11. **Physical Facilities.** In order to have a successful learning environment, the layout and decor of the classroom are major concerns. The classroom should be equipped with comfortable chairs and desks for at least twenty–five students (maximum class size for the foreign language course), as well as a desk and a chair for the instructor. Seating students in small groups around tables rather than in rows will be effective. A relatively large blackboard (or marker board) and appropriate lighting in the classroom are needed to accelerate a productive teaching–learning environment. Ideally the room will have a big window through which students can see the outside. An overhead projector (OHP) and a video cassette recorder (VCR) are useful. Finally, a big world map on the wall and flowers in a vase might be effective for creating a pleasant learning atmosphere.

12. **Steps for Challenge and Support.** The following specific steps will be taken in order to create for the students a climate which is a blend of challenge and support in this course:

Step 1: Creating a "Super Syllabus." The syllabus includes: (a) instructor's

name, office number, telephone, and hours; (b) course by number, section, title, meeting days and times, building and room numbers; (c) prerequisites for the course; (d) description of the course, course goals or objectives, required purchases (texts and supplies); (e) due dates for major assignments (place, data, time of midterm and final exams); (f) grading standards and criteria; (g) policies regarding academic honesty, attendance, and late assignments; (h) and topics to be covered in sequence, with dates. In addition, it will be helpful if the syllabus has (i) a space for names and telephone numbers of at least two classmates (for a checklist, see Appendix A).

Step 2: Making the First Class Successful. "A good beginning makes a good ending," so the first day of class can go a long way toward setting the tone for the rest of the course. Instead of just handing out the syllabus and explaining the course, the following three goals must be accomplished on the first day of class: (a) get to know students' names, backgrounds, reasons for taking the course, and instructional preferences; (b) help the students to know each other as well as to know the instructor; and (c) communicate the instructor's expectations to students and to let students know what they can expect from the instructor.

Step 3: Giving Innovative Lectures. Mckeachie (1994) wrote, "Effective lectures combine the talents of scholar, writer, producer, comedian, showman, and teacher in ways that contribute to student learning" (p. 53). Although lecturing has disadvantages (e.g., placing students in a passive rather than an active role), it does have advantages; for example, a classroom lecture places greater emphasis upon the importance of the instructor–student interactions. Eye–contact is maintained with a smile while using *Hiragana* and katakana charts in promoting an interesting and

innovative lecture.

Step 4: Making Questioning Effective. Effective student–teacher interactions will be promoted in an environment in which students feel free to ask questions of the instructor and their classmates. For instance, becoming Purkey's invitational teacher will be beneficial in the session of questions and answers: (a) maintaining "I–messages" which convey how the teacher feels about the situation not feels about the student; (b) listening with care (picking up subtle cues); and (c) being real with the student (providing only deserved praise). More important, the instructor should learn student names as soon as possible, have one–to–one contact, and try to develop rapport with each student in the class.

Step 5: Organizing Small Group Activities. Physically arranging the students closer to the instructor and each other in the classroom (even placing students in a circle in discussion groups) accelerates learning in a foreign language class. It might be a good idea to conduct a learning–style inventory on each student to make group activities productive; thus this will be effectively used to divide students into group exercises based upon the types of learning styles (i.e., diverger, assimilator, converger, and accommodator).

Step 6: Giving Challenging and Interesting Homework Assignments. Five take–home assignments will involve the three types of written characters of the Japanese language (*Hiragana*, *Katakana*, and *Kanji*). These will be graded (late assignments will result in a half–credit). To complete the homework assignments, students can use any source of information, such as the text, notes, written materials, handouts, and dictionaries; but the students must work on the assignments independently. Assignments provide a good

opportunities to increase teacher-student interactions. An appropriate feedback to each of the students' assignments should be given.

Step 7: Testing and Evaluating. There will be an oral test, and a midterm and final tests during the semester. The best way to prepare for the tests is to complete all the homework assignments. The grading scale is absolute, not relative (not based on a curve); therefore, one student's grade does not influence another student's grade. The content of the tests must be valid and reflect what the students have learned in the class; at the same time, the tests should be reasonable and interesting. In this course, six (6) absences are permitted. Each student who misses beyond six (unexcused absences) will be penalized by a reduction of one grade letter. The student's attendance and participation, as well as effort and improvement, are essential for the grade.

13. **Facilitative Environment**. The instructor of the Japanese language can provide a facilitative environment in each of the following specific points:

a. The students will have a sense of achievement by receiving appropriate feedback on their homework assignments and examinations (red should be avoided for written feedback, and blue and green will be used). Furthermore, it is extremely important for the instructor to use the verbal encouragement positively as a way of motivating the students.

b. The students will have opportunities for reflection and retrospection by being asked basic questions which stimulate thoughts, provoking a discussion the students will be drawn into the discussion on basic concepts which allows them to achieve a feeling of importance and competency. Also, the class should provide for flexibility on discussion issues; this allows for meeting the individual student needs.

c. The students will experience choice by opportunities to demonstrate

mastery of competencies by completion of assignments, oral presentations and/or tests, as well as sundry drills and exercises in learning experiences.

d. The students will be prevented from experiencing excessive anxiety by providing accessibility to the instructor after the class so that the student can call for help when needed. It is important that each student receives positive eye-contact with positive comments from the instructor. It is also important that the instructor shows sincere affection by interest in what each of the students says and does.

e. The students will be provided with ways to play varied roles through the provision of Kolb's experiential learning model. The students should be encouraged to be creative, to take risks, and not to be afraid of challenging either what they may read in the textbook or what the instructor may say.

E. Learning Activities

14. In Kolb's Model, learning is conceived as a four-stage cycle: CONCRETE EXPERIENCE (engaging in new experiences), REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION (reflecting perspective experiences), ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION (creating concepts to integrate observations into theories), and ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION (utilizing theories to make decisions). The following provisions will be made to ensure that the students engage systematically in Kolb's model:

Step 1: Concrete Experience (feeling)

a. Language lab experiences

b. Guest speakers

c. Observations

d. Films

e. Self–tests

Step 2: Reflective Observation (watching)

a. Small group discussions

b. Reaction papers

c. Practices and exercises

d. Formulated questions

Step 3: Abstract Conceptualization (thinking)

a. Hiragana and katakana charts

b. Printed material and handouts

c. Tapes and videocassettes

d. Lectures

Step 4: Active Experimentation (doing)

a. Individual and group practices

b. Role playing

c. Written assignments

d. Word games

e. Self–introduction in Japanese

f. Fold paper cranes

g. Oral presentations

15. **Separate Knowing and Connected Knowing.** The following provisions will be made for honoring both separate knowing and connected knowing. Although this will be an introductory course, students will be expected to build a solid foundation for the study of contemporary Japanese. The Japanese language is usually written in a combination of *Kanji, Hiragana,* and Katakana. An understanding of the separate knowing regarding these three characters in the language is encouraged through the workbook, drills,

and exercises. One example of connected knowing is that in writing Japanese, most nouns, verb roots, and adjectives are represented by *Kanji*, while the verb and adjective endings indicating the various tenses are written in *Hiragana* and *Katakana*. Ultimately, students should obtain a good grasp of what kind of language Japanese is, while learning the basic conversational patterns through both connected knowing and separated knowing.

16. **Active Learning**. The underlying principle guiding the instruction for this course is that oral and written presentations will be followed by learning activities (Practice makes perfect!). Active learning can be fostered (a) by giving an appropriate feedback to the student's assignments and academic tasks, (b) by tape-recording the student's pronunciation to remedy mispronunciation, and (c) by encouraging the student by explaining that people can learn their native languages without specific instructions, but learning foreign languages is totally different.
17. **Instructional Method.** This course features a combination of drills and practices, group activities, discussions, guest presentations, films and videotapes, as well as lecturers. However, the lecture, which is probably the oldest and still most widely used teaching method, will be the major instructional method in this course, too. The goal of the course is to develop a climate of cooperation and not competition. The class is based upon the concept of cooperative learning; also, the students are expected to attend regularly and to complete all the course work.
18. **Learning Activities.** How do the learning activities relate, either explicitly or implicitly, to the issues and concerns students are dealing with? All kinds of learning activities in the Kolb learning cycle (integration, discover, application, and transformation) are interrelated in the course, explicitly and

implicitly, in order to build a solid foundation for the study of Japanese as a second language. It should be emphasized that concrete experience (dealing with human situations in a personal way), reflective observation (concerning with what is true), abstract conceptualization (thinking as opposed to feeling), and active experimentation (concerning with what works as opposed to what is absolute truth) will have a vital role to play in this course.

19. **Different Developmental Levels**. Particularly in learning foreign languages, each student's developmental level differs. Some students improve in speaking and some students in writing. The certain passing requirement for the course will be set. For the students who can learn more, more challenging assignments will be given. In terms of encouraging the students whose developmental levels differ, the following points should be kept in mind: (a) the instructor's physical actions are more important than are the instructor's expectations of student achievement; (b) if the instructor fails to monitor the progress of the student for whom the instructor held high expectations, the student will underachieve, and vice versa; (c) and if the instructor has good instructional skills, expectations are not so impressive upon the student's achievement. It is important to help the students with various learning levels all enjoy and learn from the class.
20. **Different Styles of Learning.** The instructor will soon be aware that different learning styles exist. Differences in learning styles should be acknowledged, and teaching styles should be adapted so that all learning styles are allowed for. As stated before, it will be useful for the instructor to conduct a learning-style inventory on each student to make group activities successful. "Learning" is a complex and self-reinforcing process. More important, teachers have profound influences on the student's academic achievement,

and the teachers should not confuse the student's learning manner with the quality of the student's intellectual ability. Mckeachie emphasized the use of varied teaching approaches, moving between lecture, discussion, small group work, and language laboratory and evaluation of the student's work from multiple perspectives, such as (a) welcoming comments that seek synthesis and understanding rather than argumentation and analysis, and (b) rewarding collaboration and individual effort.

21. **Coaching students' progress for individualization asks,** "How will you 'coach' the students in finding ways to individualize the course for themselves? Coaching largely depends upon how students learn, how teachers teach, and how teachers and students interact. Most students know very little about the roles their own capabilities play in learning. In this course the instructor can coach the student how to use the Japanese–English dictionary effectively. The instructor also can coach how to develop learning strategies (long–term plan) and learning tactics (rehearsal, mnemonic devices) in learning Japanese. Around midterm, a discussion will be opened regarding how each student is studying Japanese; this will be very informative and stimulating to each student. Finally, the instructor will continuously monitor each student's progress to give appropriate support when needed.
22. **Coaching students' progress for integrations asks,** "How will you 'coach' the students in making connections between the concepts and approaches of the various disciplines, so the students can integrate their entire learning experience?" One of the central metaphors of this information age is of the human mind as a computer. Yet computers may never think as human beings do. The instructor can coach the student develop strategies for retrieving, such as elaboration which assists encoding and retrieval by linking

the to-be-remembered information with other knowledge. Thus the instructor can coach thinking about relevant knowledge which can strengthen new learning by generating meaningful relations to new information. In addition, the instructor is more effective by asking thoughtful questions than by giving brilliant lectures. Perhaps the most impressive instructor may use a technique of only asking questions, not stating opinions. The instructor should try to develop the question and center question skills: "what would you have done?"; or "If you disagree, why?"; or "How would you measure inefficiencies?" Think of Socrates.

F. Testing

23. **Two types of tests** (written and oral), which are connected to the course purpose and objectives, will be given to all the students. The tests are basically connected to mastering *Hiragana* and Katakana and acquainted with the development of *Kanji*. The tests are also connected to the understanding of basic rules, such as, nouns, verb roots, and adjectives as represented by *Kanji*. The verb and adjective endings indicating the various tenses are written in *Hiragana* and Katakana. Bloom's taxonomy can be applied to the testing as follows:

Level 1: **Knowledge**: Remembering learned material, such as definitions, concepts, and principles.

a. What are the definitions of *Hiragana* and Katakana?

b. What is the function of *Kanji*?

Level 2: **Comprehension**: Understanding the meaning of remembered materials and translating the materials.

a. What is the difference between "*wa*" and "*ga*"?

b. What does "*Hajimemashite*" mean in English?

Level 3: **Application**: Using rules, principles, and concepts in a new context to answer a question.

a. Put appropriate words in the blanks. Example: *Korewa* [ ] *desuka*?

Level 4: **Analysis**: Breaking materials into parts and explaining the relationships between those parts.

a. Translate into Japanese, using *Kanji*.

Example: Excuse me. What time is it now?

Level 5: **Synthesis**: Putting parts together to form a new whole, pattern, or structure.

a. Use the following words and create a sentence.

Level 6: **Evaluation**: Using criteria set by either the student or the instructor to arrive at a judgment.

a. Listen to the tape spoken at natural speed and grasp the meaning of the conversation.

24. Tests. Tests will accommodate student characteristics as follows. The majority of the students in the course will be Caucasian males who will be relatively young with different expectations. Two types of test items (objective and essay) will be used. Standardized tests will be appropriate for this course; if original tests are developed, they should be pilot-tested to make sure that the students will be able to answer the tests. Mixing true-false, multiple choice, matching, and short answers on one test should be avoided. Around midterm, the instructor can have an open discussion evaluating what has been happening and set guidelines for the remainder of the course. The content of the tests must be challenging and interesting for all the students.

Finally, the instructor should keep in mind that evaluation is one of the best ways to motivate and encourage the student to learn.

G. Other Considerations

25. Is it difficult to learn Japanese?

The stereo–typical view of the Japanese language should be considered and addressed in the syllabus. Students who have started taking foreign language courses tend to drop the course at the beginning of the semester. The Japanese course is no exception. These dropouts create all kinds of problems, including the loses of money by the college or university. The Japanese language has its own peculiar sentence structures and writing systems and has little in common with other languages of the world. Students view Japanese as a minor language and extremely difficult to learn (many people never try it). In fact, as stated in **Nippon: *The Land and Its People*** (1982), Japanese ranks side by side with English, Russian, Chinese, French, German, and Arabic as one of the major languages of the world.

The question is, "Is it difficult to learn Japanese?" From the linguistic point of view, Japanese is considered as one of the easier languages for a beginner to approach. Spoken Japanese is not difficult at all. This is evidenced by the fact that many foreign visitors master the language well enough for their daily needs after only one year's stay. Japanese has a simple pronunciation scheme and few exceptions to grammatical rules. Restrictions on sentence structures are not severe. Probably the reading and writing of *Kanji* characters are the most difficult aspects of the language. All these considerations should be addressed clearly in the syllabus in order to encourage the students for continuous study of the Japanese language.

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Appendix A

A Syllabus Checklist

A "Super Syllabus" will include:

_____ Your name, title, office number, office telephone, and office hours

_____ Course by number, section, title, meeting days and times, room, and building

_____ Prerequisite(s) for the course

_____ Description of the course

_____ Course goals and/or objectives

_____ Required purchases: texts and supplies

_____ Space for names and telephone numbers of at least two classmates

_____ Due dates for major assignments: place, date, time of final exam

_____ Grading standards and criteria

_____ Policies regrading academic dishonesty, attendance, and late assignments

_____ Topics to be covered in sequence with dates

_____ Reading assignments and dates due

Source: *Teaching Assistant Orientation Manual*, 1997, University of Memphis, p. 28.